

Driving With Diminished Skills



Driving & Dementia In Iowa

As family members, caregivers or other concerned individuals, you've taken the responsibility to examine the options facing the older Iowan in your life. One of the major concerns of older Iowans who continue to drive is how the onset and progression of dementia can affect their safety and the safety of others. Dementia is a disease of the brain that causes a slow, steady decline in memory, reasoning and other thinking tasks. With dementia, drivers may become lost, have near misses, or may be involved in crashes. This brochure will give you useful information on taking action to protect your loved one and the community.

Warning Signs

One or more of these behaviors may mean it is time to limit or stop driving. The person:

- is unable to locate familiar places;
- does not obey traffic signs;
- makes slow or poor decisions in traffic;
- drives too fast or too slow;
- has specific problems at intersections i.e., understanding who has the right-of-way or not checking the intersection thoroughly; and/or
- becomes angry or confused while driving.

Startling Statistics

Individuals with dementia are twice as likely to be involved in a traffic accident as other persons the same age.

Data indicate that 50 percent of persons with Alzheimer's disease (the most common form of dementia) still drive for up to three years after they have been diagnosed with the disease.

What actions can you take?

- Encourage the person to voluntarily stop driving.
- Reassure the person that rides will be available.
 - Offer alternative forms of transportation, such as the regional transit system. All 99 Iowa counties are served by these transit providers.
 - Drive the older person yourself, or arrange for someone else to drive.
- Solicit support of others.
 - Have driving skills tested at a special independent driving evaluation center.
 - Ask the physician to send a letter to the Iowa DOT's Office of Driver Services advising the person is unsafe to drive.
- Make the car less accessible.
 - Take away the keys.
 - Substitute a key that doesn't fit.
 - Disable the car by removing the distributor cap.
 - Have a mechanic install a "kill switch" or alarm system that disengages the fuel line to prevent the car from starting.
 - Restrict access to the vehicle.

Information from the Iowa DOT's Office of Driver Services

In Iowa, any individual may ask the DOT to reexamine the ability of another person to drive safely. Family members often find this difficult, if not impossible, and seek out the help of a physician or peace officer. A reexamination involves both written and road testing, and may also include a requirement for medical information.

While older individuals with diminishing skills can be a hazard to themselves and others, they are often safe drivers in areas that are familiar to them. In recognition of this, DOT driver license examiners will assess a person's driving skills in that driver's own area. For many older Iowans, this process results in a license that allows them independence and mobility, but does restrict them to local areas and sometimes "daylight only" driving privileges.

Basic driver license renewal information

- Most driver's licenses expire on the person's birthday. There are exceptions for individuals who are not U.S. citizens.
- Individuals under the age of 18 and 70 years of age and older can only be issued two-year licenses.
- Individuals with certain medical conditions will be licensed for a maximum of two years; and some with progressive diseases, such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's may only receive one-year licenses.
- Vision is screened each time a person renews the driving privilege, although vision statements from an eye doctor are accepted in place of the screening.
- Each individual, regardless of age, must be physically and mentally capable of driving safely.
 - Drivers may be asked to provide medical information to attest to those capabilities.
 - Drivers may be asked to take a drive test to determine if restrictions are necessary.
 - Drivers should tell driver license staff about their medical conditions and medications if they affect driving.

Frequently asked questions about having a driver retested

Under the law, a concerned person can submit a report requesting an evaluation of a driver whose skills are questionable.

Who can be reported?

Any person with a physical, mental or visual impairment, regardless of age.

Who can file a report?

Family, physicians, health care professionals, law enforcement officers and other concerned citizens.

Will the driver know who made the report?

Yes. If a person asks to know who signed the report, the driver license examiner will show them.

If the driver refuses to take the exams, what happens?

If a driver doesn't take the exams, their license will be suspended.

What will happen if a person filing the report intentionally makes a false report?

Reexams are not scheduled just because someone makes a report. The Office of Driver Services reviews all requests and makes a determination as to whether the person will be required to take the exams.

What happens if the driver does not pass the exams?

The person must pass the required exams. If the person fails, the department will suspend the license. The person will then be given the opportunity to study and test again. If the person is suspended, as a final action, the person may appeal that decision through the hearing process.

Note: If a medical report states the person should not drive, the department will suspend the driving privilege.

For additional information about driving and dementia, contact the nearest office of the Greater Iowa Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association (addresses on back).



For more information contact:

Iowa Department of Transportation

Office of Driver Services
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PO Box 9204
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Greater Iowa Chapter of Alzheimer's Association Offices:

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